

IN THE CLAIMS:

Kindly amend Claims 1, 3, 4, 6-10, 12, 15 and 17, and add new Claims 18-20 as follows. The current status of all claims in the case are also set forth below.

1. (Currently Amended) A process for producing a microgel having a mean particle size of 0.1-1,000 μm , the process comprising:

dissolving in an aqueous solvent a hydrophilic compound capable of forming a gel,
~~causing~~ allowing the resultant mixture to stand until the temperature of the mixture becomes
lower than the gelation temperature, to thereby form a gel, and

pulverizing the gel into a microgel having a mean particle size of 0.1-1,000 μm .

2. (Previously presented) The process according to claim 1, wherein the hydrophilic compound capable of forming a gel and a viscosity increasing compound incapable of forming a gel are dissolved in the aqueous solvent.

3. (Currently Amended) The process according to claim 1, wherein the hydrophilic compound capable of forming a gel is one or more hydrophilic compounds selected from the group consisting of agar, carrageenan ~~gum~~, curdlan, gelatin, gellan gum, and alginic acid.

4. (Currently Amended) The process according to claim ~~1~~ 2, wherein the viscosity increasing compound incapable of forming a gel is one or more viscosity increasing compounds selected from the group consisting of xanthan gum, succinoglycan, polyacrylic acid, polyethylene glycol, polyacrylamide, and a polyalkylacrylamide/polyacrylamide copolymer.

5. (Previously presented) The process according to claim 1, wherein the gel is pulverized into a microgel having a mean particle size of 1 to 300 μm .

6. (Currently Amended) The process according to claim 1, wherein the gel microgel has a viscosity of 2,000-1,000,000 mPa·s (B-type viscometer, 25°C).

7. (Currently Amended) A process for producing an external composition, said process comprising:

dissolving in an aqueous solvent a hydrophilic compound capable of forming a gel ~~and a viscosity-increasing compound incapable of forming a gel,~~

~~causing~~ allowing the resultant mixture to stand until the temperature of the mixture becomes lower than the gelation temperature, to thereby form a gel,

pulverizing the gel into a microgel having a mean particle size of 0.1-1,000 μm; and

mixing the microgel with ~~a pharmaceutical ingredient and/or a salt~~ one or more remaining ingredients to obtain the external composition.

8. (Currently Amended) The process according to claim 7, wherein ~~the pharmaceutical ingredient is one or more pharmaceutical ingredients selected from the group consisting of vitamins, anti-inflammatory agents, antibacterial agents, and whitening ingredients~~ the external composition contains a pharmaceutical ingredient and/or a salt.

9. (Currently Amended) The process according to claim 7 8, wherein the pharmaceutical ingredient is one or more ~~whitening ingredients selected from the group consisting of L-ascorbic acid, an L-ascorbic acid derivative, arbutin, glutathione, tranexamic acid, a tranexamic acid derivative, a placenta extract, and a vegetable extract exhibiting whitening effect~~ pharmaceutical ingredients selected from the group consisting of vitamins, anti-inflammatory agents, antibacterial agents, and whitening ingredients.

10. (Currently Amended) The process according to claim 7 8, wherein the external composition contains 0.1 to 20 mass% of the pharmaceutical ingredient and/or the salt.
11. (Previously presented) The process according to claim 7, wherein the external composition is a cosmetic composition.
12. (Currently Amended) The ~~external composition of~~ process according to claim 9 7, wherein ~~the amount of the pharmaceutical ingredient and/or the salt is 0.01-20 mass % of the total of the composition~~ the external composition is a hair dye.
13. (Previously presented) The process according to claim 7, wherein the hydrophilic compound capable of forming a gel and a viscosity increasing compound incapable of forming a gel are dissolved in the aqueous solvent.
14. (Previously presented) The process according to claim 7, wherein the hydrophilic compound capable of forming a gel is one or more hydrophilic compounds selected from the group consisting of agar, carrageenan, curdlan, gelatin, gellan gum, and alginic acid.
15. (Currently Amended) The process according to claim 7 13, wherein the viscosity increasing compound incapable of forming a gel is one or more viscosity increasing compounds selected from the group consisting of xanthan gum, succinoglycan, polyacrylic acid, polyethylene glycol, polyacrylamide, and a polyalkylacrylamide/polyacrylamide copolymer.
16. (Previously presented) The process according to claim 7, wherein the gel is pulverized into a microgel having a mean particle size of 1 to 300 μm .
17. (Currently Amended) The process according to claim 7, wherein the gel microgel has a viscosity of 2,000-1,000,000 mPa·s (B-type viscometer, 25°C).

18. (New) A method of increasing viscosity of an external composition, which method comprising:

dissolving in an aqueous solvent a hydrophilic compound capable of forming a gel,
allowing the resultant mixture to stand until the temperature of the mixture becomes lower than the gelation temperature, to thereby form a gel,
pulverizing the gel into a microgel having a mean particle size of 0.1-1,000 μm , and
mixing the resultant microgel with one or more remaining ingredients to obtain the external composition.

19. (New) The method according to claim 18, wherein the external composition contains a pharmaceutical ingredient and/or a salt.

20. (New) The method according to claim 18, wherein the hydrophilic compound capable of forming a gel and a viscosity increasing compound